

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, BA, SA
SUBJ: BAHRAIN-SAUDI CAUSEWAY: CAUSE FOR ALARM?

REF: MANAMA 520

1. DURING CALL ON BAHRAIN CHARGE YOUSEF ABDULLAH KHALIFA, POLITICAL OFFICER ASKED ABOUT SOME OF ISSUES RAISED REFTEL. KHALIFA SAID THAT SAUDIS TO HIS KNOWLEDGE HAVE NEVER EXERTED ANY PRESSURE ON BAHRAIN TO CHANGE ITS SOCIAL SYSTEM OR BRING IT MORE INTO LINE WITH WAHHABI VERSION OF ISLAMIC LAW. NOR DID HE FORESEE THEM DOING SO FOLLOWING CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAUSEWAY.

2. KHALIFA SAID HIS JUDGMENT WAS BASED ON THE SPECIAL NATURE OF SAUDI-BAHRAINI RELATIONS WHICH ARE VERY CLOSE DESPITE DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY. SPECIFICALLY, MANY BAHRAINIS REGARD SAUDI ARABIA AS THE "MOTHER COUNTRY", AND THERE ARE MANY BAHRAINIS WITH CLOSE FAMILIAL TIES TO SAUDI EASTERN PROVINCE. ON ITS PART, THE SAUDI ARABIAN GOVERNMENT RESPECTS THE SOVEREIGN RIGHTS OF ITS FRIENDLY NEIGHBOR, VIEWING BAHRAIN'S CHOICE OF SOCIAL SYSTEM AS
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ESSENTIALLY A PRIVATE MATTER.

3. KHALIFA'S COMMENT IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF BAHRAINI FOREIGN MINISTER SHAIKH MOHAMMAD (PARA 2 REFTEL) WHO SAID THAT THOSE WHO EXPECT DEMANDS FOR CHANGE FROM SAUDIS UNDERSTAND NEITHER SAUDIS NOR NATURE OF SAUDI-BAHRAINI RELATIONSHIP. FYI: THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND ISLAM EITHER, SINCE

THERE IS NOTHING ISLAMIC ABOUT CLOSING SHOPS OR PLACES
OF WORK ON FRIDAYS. END FYI.

4. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT EXAMPLE OF SAUDI "PRES-
SURE" FOR CHANGE CITED PARA 3 REFTEL (BANNING MALE HAIR-
DRESSERS IN LADIES' SALONS) CAME NOT FROM ANY SAUDI GOV-
ERNMENT OFFICIAL, BUT FROM SAUDI RELIGIOUS LEADERS. PER-
HAPS THE VERY CLOSENESS OF EASTERN PROVINCE-BAHRAIN
RELATIONS GAVE THESE LEADERS IMPRESSION THEY COULD COMMENT
ON SOCIAL CONDITIONS ON NEIGHBORING ISLAND.

5. WE COULD SUGGEST TWO POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FEARS OF
EXPATRIATE WORKERS ABOUT FUTURE OF BAHRAIN(S LIBERAL
SOCIETY: FIRST, THE PROXIMITY OF THE "WAHHABI GIANT"
TO BAHRAIN COULD MAGNIFY THE FRIGHTENING EFFECTS OF USUAL
EXPATRIATE HORROR STORIES COMING OUT OF SAUDI ARABIA.
SECOND, RUMORS AND REPORTS CITED COULD CONTAIN ELE-
MENT OF SELF-SERVING ON PART OF OLD BAHRAIN HANDS TRYING
TO FRIGHTEN OFF POTENTIAL COMPETITORS AMONG NEW ARRIVALS.
THESE NEWCOMERS MIGHT BE DISCOURAGED BY STORIES ABOUT
IMMINENT DEMISE OF PERSIAN GULF'S EXPATRIATE PARADISE
WHEN FIRST VEHICLES OVER NEW CAUSEWAY BRING DELEGATIONS
OF PARTICULARLY STERN WAHHABI SHEIKHS. BUT WHATEVER THE
CAUSE OF THESE FEARS, THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING NOTED
PARAGRAPH 3 ABOVE IS CERTAINLY A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR.

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6. WE AGREE WITH ANALYSIS PARA 4 REFTEL THAT CLOSE RELA-
TIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO STATES ELIMINATES NEED FOR DISCUS-
SION OF THESE SOCIAL QUESTIONS. WE ARE NOT CERTAIN, HOW-
EVER, THAT BAHRAIN SHOULD COUNT ON GREATER LIBERALISM IN
SAUDI ARABIA WHEN CAUSEWAY IS BUILT IN FIVE-SEVEN YEARS.
MOREOVER, IF NATURE OF THE SAUDI-BAHRAINI RELATIONSHIP
IS IN FACT AS DESCRIBED, THEN PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF
CREEPING LIBERALISM IN SAUDI ARABIA WILL HAVE LITTLE
EFFECT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN BAHRAIN.
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